

**Testimony of Juan Gonzalez,
From the National Association of the Hispanic Journalists,
To the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet
Of the House of Representatives
December 5, 2007**

Good morning Chairman Markey and committee members. My name is Juan Gonzalez. I am here today representing the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, a non-profit organization with more than 2,000 members who work in television, radio and newspapers across the United States. I am a founder and former president of that association, a staff columnist for the New York *Daily News*, and a co-host of the national radio program Democracy Now!

In nearly thirty years as a professional journalist, I have never testified before a governmental body on any issue. But I and the members of my association are here today to plead for your help because the profession we love and the media industry in which we labor has repeatedly and profoundly failed the “public interest, convenience or necessity” of a huge portion of our population – the approximately 100 million Americans of African, Hispanic, Asian and Native descent.

Even as our nation has become ever more diverse racially and ethnically - people of color now comprise 35% of the population - minority ownership of the broadcast companies that provide the public essential news reports and interpretations of daily events has remained at shockingly low levels.

Last week, the non-profit group Free Press released perhaps the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the state of minority ownership of the 1,300 full power commercial television stations in the U.S. Unfortunately, neither the FCC nor any other agency in the federal government is even bothering to keep accurate records on this anymore. The Free Press study found the percentage of minority-owned stations declined from an already paltry 3.45 percent in 2006 to 3.1 percent this year, and that among African Americans it plummeted from just 19 stations to 8. (See Chart 1)

Since 1998, even though the total number of commercial TV stations has increased by about 13%, the number of minority-owned stations has stagnated.

Today, minorities own just 5 of the 845 stations which are affiliated with the four major television networks. That’s less than 1%. And radio is hardly much better. A 2006 study by Free Press concluded that minorities owned just 8 per cent of the 10,000 commercial radio stations in the country.

The broadcast industry has one of the poorest levels of minority ownership in American business. Overall minority ownership in the general non-farm sector reached nearly 18%

(Chart 2) in 2002, the last year for which we have comprehensive government data. That's five times better than television and twice the level of radio.

FCC Chairman Martin's plan to permit expanded cross-ownership by newspapers of television stations places the future of minority ownership in even greater jeopardy. That's because virtually all minority-owned stations are ranked below the top four in their given markets. Under the Chairman's plan, all 19 minority-owned stations currently operating in the top 20 markets – the precise markets where cross-ownership would be permitted - would become potential targets for purchase by local daily newspapers.

Some might ask why we as journalists place so much emphasis on the racial and ethnic composition of media owners. It's simple. Direct experience has shown us that ownership matters when it comes to diversity in newsroom employment and, more importantly, when it comes to a diversity of voices and meeting the news and information needs of minority communities.

Not surprisingly, the percentage of journalists of color working at local TV stations and at daily newspapers also declined last year, and minority employment in both local broadcasting and newspapers continues to lag far behind overall population.

For eleven years our association has issued annual reports on the coverage of Hispanics by the evening news broadcasts of the major television networks. Year in and year and year out, the results are inevitably the same: less than 1% of network news has been devoted to stories that specifically focus on Hispanics. Depending on the year, anywhere from 30 to 45% of that small universe of stories has centered on two main issues – immigration and crime. A more marginalized and distorted image of the Latino population in America could not be imagined.

Previous FCC studies have confirmed a direct nexus between minority ownership, work force diversity, and the content of news. As the Supreme Court concluded in the Metro Broadcasting case: "A broadcast industry with representative minority participation will produce more variation and diversity than will one whose ownership is drawn from a single racially and ethnically homogenous group."

Unfortunately, the FCC, first under Chairman Michael Powell and now under Chairman Martin, has ignored the problem and seeks to rush ahead with policies that could widen the ownership disparity, thus ignored its regulatory obligations under Section 257 of the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

NAHJ and more than 20 civil rights groups have called on the FCC to address minority ownership by creating an independent task force on the issue before it adopts new rules. We have also called on the FCC to conduct an accurate ownership census and to study the impact of consolidation on minority ownership. Chairman Martin has refused the deal with the issue.

In closing, I must note that 2008 will mark the 200th anniversary of the first Spanish-language newspaper in the U.S. – El Misisipi in New Orleans. It was 180 years ago that John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish, two free black men fed up with the racial slanders and misrepresentations of New York City's all-white newspapers, launched Freedom's Journal, the first black newspaper in America. "*We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us,*" they said in that first issue. "*From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented.*" Ever since, journalists of color have labored to eliminate bias and misrepresentation in American news coverage.

Chairman Markey, we urge the members of your committee to reject this rush to greater consolidation.

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